IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

Another Interesting Letter from a Sunny Land.

An Ancient Stone—Its Importance in Clearing Up an Historical Controversy—Ruins of an Ancient City—Some Rare Relics.

[Special Correspondence.]
[Copyrighted, 1889.]

THE day following my last letter we abandoned our camp at Sun Lake, taking the trail down its outlet, leading toward the foothills of a high range of mountains running parallel with the eastern coast line of Nicaragua. This was done with the double purpose of ascertaining the course of the river, as well as to visit a neighboring tribe, who were accredited with the possession of a marvelous stone, termed by the Sambos *silma walpa*, or stone from the stars. They had so long dilated upon the virtues of this wonderful stone until we were resolved to find out more about it.

Two days journey brought us to a beautiful series of cataracts, near which was located the village of the chief, or *wita*, in whose possession was the *piedra antigua*, that had been the occasion of so many miraculous tales. We first sent our interpreter, who was a Sambo himself, to ascertain if we would be permitted to view the studiously-guarded relic. He soon returned with the consent of the *wita*, and directed us to the thatched roof palace of the chieftain.

Before reaching it, however, two of the wise men had been apprised of what was going on and we found them in animated conversation with the chief when we reached his domicile. From the interpreter we learned that they were trying to dissuade the *wita* from carrying out his resolve to allow us to see the stone, and were predicting that dire calamities would follow such a sacrilege. Just why the stone possessed such wonderful interest we subsequently ascertained, but the *wita* finally dismissed his wise men, and with a very gruff demeanor entered his palace and bade us follow. On one side of the room we observed a large object, covered with a grass-platted mat, and as there was no other convenient place I started to seat myself upon it while awaiting the *wita's* pleasure. But I was instantly caught by the chief, who, with numerous wild gestures, tried to inform me that that was the mysterious stone. He then proceeded to carefully uncover the same

THE STONE.

and displayed to view a queerly-formed stone, jagged upon one side and comparatively smooth upon the other, with certain fading, indistinct characters rudely carved upon its surface.

At first nothing could be made of these characters, but by brushing away an accumulation of dirt and carefully scanning the whole surface it was easy to observe letters and figures, written in slightly irregular form over a space of perhaps two feet square, for the stone had a circumference of over nine feet and must have weighed about seven hundred pounds.

By tracing carefully the indentations and the use of a small magnifying glass the following was obtained:

The inscription was very indistinct, and the second word had also the appearance of "Murio." Translated from the Spanish it means:

"Here suffered (or was killed) the unfortunate Diego de Nicuesa, April 5, 1511."

As it aids materially in clearing up an important historical controversy we stop here to give the historical facts leading up to this connection:

The fate of the famous Spanish navigator, Nicuesa, has long been wrapped in mystery. He was a rich Spanish courtier, who had been given the government of Veragua, now comprehended in the territory from Colon to Cape Gracios a Dios.

Toward the close of the year 1510 he sailed for the new province with 685 men, and landed on the isthmus of Darien, after experiencing untold privations, the loss of two of his vessels in a storm and the stranding of the other in one of the noxious inlets of the coast. In a short while fever and Indians had reduced his force to seventy men. Through the rivalry and treachery of Vasco Nunez de Balboa, a mutiny followed, and the latter became Governor, forcing Nicuesa to sea in a little boat with sixteen companions, who were never afterwards heard from, except a report that hostile Indians had prevented them from landing at the mouth of the San Juan, the present site of Greytown. It is quite natural to suppose that they continued up the coast toward Blewfields Lagoon, in the hope of reaching a settlement at Gracios a Dios. But hunger and thirst must have finally driven them ashore somewhere near the Lagoon, and in their weak and famished condition they became easy victims to the warlike tribes that then and even now infest this part of the coast. This brings us to the evidence above described as throwing long-deferred light upon this mystified part of the history of the early Spanish conquest. It corresponds closely to the historical account of the loss of Nicuesa and party, who left the Rio Belen on March 1, 1511.

But how came this huge stone here, over one hundred and twenty miles from the coast? Did Nicuesa and party abandon their boat and penetrate the interior? If not, how could such a large stone have been transported from the coast, through rivers and over high mountains, with no vehicle or other possibility than being dragged here by the Indians? If the latter, why should such veneration attach to the relic by the uncivilized tribes who found it? These were the puzzling questions prompted by our discovery, which was not cleared away by the tradition that was repeated by the *wita* in whose possession we had found it. As near as could be interpreted the tradition runs as follows:

The *wita* indicated by a handful of sand that it was so many suns ago as the grains it contained, that his *aizes* (forefathers) were oppressed and many of them murdered by strange men who came up out of the water, blew fire with their breath and carried thunder and lightning in their hands. They prayed to *Rushika*, their God, for deliverance, when a great *niknik* (earthquake) followed and this stone was heaved from the stars, and falling upon and rolling amid them destroyed the strange men. From this circumstance it was called *silma walpa*, or stone from the stars, and had been kept in the possession of the tribe ever since and guarded jealously by every generation.

This tradition undoubtedly points to the early Spaniards, as they were the men "who came up out of the water," and their murderous fire-arms, unknown at the time to the Indians, led them to think that the strange men blew fire with their breath and carried lightning in their hands. And in this country of frequent earthquakes it is quite likely that the day the Spaniards had died or were destroyed a *niknik* should occur and the finding of the inscribed stone near the same place was interpreted by their ignorant wise men as a stone of deliverance, hurled from the stars upon their enemies. Else the party had died of starvation about the stone, where they had left this record of their fate and there they were found simultaneously with the appearance of an earthquake. In fact, it is known that throughout the tropical world many earthquakes occurred during the early part of the sixteenth century. So that the tradition is founded upon fact, with a strange admixture of superstition.

While at this village we encountered in one of the huts a beautifully-chased antique bowl, and upon inquiry found that it was obtained at an old ruin about one league distant. We immediately prepared ourselves, and under the direction of the native were conducted to the point indicated, in a broad valley covered with a profuse growth of trees and vegetation. The ancient city was surely there. All about us were unmistakable evidences of what might once have been the seat of a grand and populous empire. Here and there were prostrate walls of ruined chambers, and anon a ruined bath or aqueduct—all covered with vast forests of huge trees.

We returned to the village after dark, determined to delay another day and visit the ruins for closer inspection. But the following morning was ushered in by severe rain-storms, which continued throughout the day. Despite this fact, we returned in the afternoon, and though working under great difficulties, succeeded in securing several magnificent archæological specimens of vases, idols and other minor pieces. One of these was an idol about two feet high, representing a woman in a sitting posture, with the head turned aside and a hideous forked tongue protruding from the mouth, with great elongated ears and an ugly visage, which gave it the appearance of a demon. The arms were held akimbo, originally holding something in the hands, which had been broken away. A peculiarly designed necklace was carved about the neck and the body was made nude to the waist, where some sort of drapery was constructed. It was a very quaint specimen—the duplication of which I have never seen in any collection in the States, and it will no doubt prove an interesting study for modern antiquarians. Among other specimens obtained at these ruins are a number of ancient designs or molds, corrugated with figures of frogs, snakes, turtles and animals, as well as queer-looking hieroglyphs. Some of the articles are made of stone and others of clay, hardened by fire. The appearance of the ruins, the pillars and broken colonades are carved after the style of the Aztec ruins of Yucatan and Guatemala, and can no doubt be traced to some branch of that migratory nation.

A. J. MILLER.

All He Could Promise.

Dunn—When can you settle this account, Mr. Short?

Short—Oh, come around next week.

"Will you pay me then?"

"I can't promise that exactly; but I can tell you then when to come again."—Epoch.

NO, GEORGE, an Irish shawl is not a Mikerobe, and is not, therefore, dangerous to the wearer.

AGRICULTURAL HINTS.

MAKING STONE DRAINS.

Stone, Being Imperishable, Is the Best of All Materials for Drains.

There are several ways of making permanent drains of stone; each of these depends upon the kind of stone to be used. Stones differ very much in their form; the best kind is the hard slates and gneissoid rock, which consist of flat pieces which can easily be split or broken, and of such a texture that they will not soften or break down under the action of water.

The drains of stone should not be less than ten or twelve inches in width and made round in the bottom so that the water channel may be kept in the middle, and the cutting out of the sides of the ditch will be avoided. Then

FIG. 1.

with the flat stones the manner of building the dam will be as follows: A stone-breaking hammer of six or eight pounds' weight will be required, and with this the stones are broken into long narrow strips as nearly equal in width and thickness as possible. These pieces are placed lengthwise along the sides of the ditch and firmly bedded so that the tops are even with each other, and they will not fall inward. Flat pieces are then trimmed so as to fit across the ditch and lie firmly upon the side pieces as shown in Fig. 1.

This leaves a free channel for the water, with plenty of room at the sides for it to percolate into the drain. To cover the top joints so that earth will not drop through, all the fragments are thrown into the ditch upon the cross pieces, and if there is plenty of stone to spare the ditch may be partly filled up to within a foot of the surface, so as not to interfere with the flowing. It is then filled with the earth taken out in the digging. A drain made in this way at the foot of a high slope to cut off the water from a piece of creek bottom which was a useless marsh nearly thirty years ago is still discharging a large and continuous stream of pure clear water; it is an underground brook, in fact, and works a hydraulic ram, which has delivered water at the house and barn to supply all needs since it was made.

The round stones need a different method. These should be laid in such a manner as to wedge them in the bottom of the ditch in the manner shown in Fig. 2, and throwing other stones

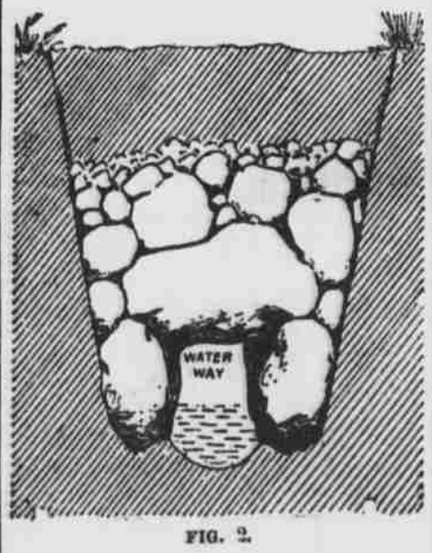

FIG. 2.

on the top to wedge the upper stone firmly in its place, and then filling in with small stone. This upper filling is important, for otherwise the capstone may be moved sidewise and one of the bottom ones fall out of place. In taking up a stone drain which had become choked it was found that by neglect of this, or by the wrong doing of it, the drain had collapsed in many places, and the carelessness of a workman with the neglect of the employer to oversee and direct the work properly caused an expense for repair which was more than twice the necessary original cost of the work.

With all these drains, as the earth covering is not more than a foot thick, the surface water should be kept from sinking directly into them, by which the soil would be washed down into the drain. To prevent this the soil should be well rounded on the surface and kept so, if it is possible, by plowing the land suitably; at least this should be done for a few years, until the earth becomes consolidated and firm. It is a good plan when a field has been drained to seed it with grass for a few years. The grass does well on newly-drained land, and if it has been very wet it will require this time for the water to find its way to the drains from the intermediate ground; after which the land will be full of small waterways and quite spongy, so that the heaviest rain will sink at once into the soil and find its way into the drains in a very short time, often not longer than three or four hours.—N. Y. Times

ABOUT MANURE.

The Relative Value of Horse and Cow Manure Discussed.

Taking both horses and cows as they are generally kept on the farm, the manure from the former will be the most valuable. I do not feel, however, like dropping the subject, says a contributor to the Breeder's Gazette, with such a brief answer, for there should be a reason given for the answer when possible, and if one will only follow up the subject opened by this question he will gain light upon one of the most important topics that can be considered on the farm. To begin at the beginning, we should bear in mind that there can only pass from our cattle what has been given to them, and that all of the elements in the manure must have been supplied in the food. As we may suppose that foods vary in amounts of fertilizing elements they carry with them, we may hold it as correct that the kind of food given to our farm animals governs the kind of manure we get from them. This is the basic principle to be borne in mind in considering the subject. The three elements of fertilizers that we care for are nitrogen, phosphoric acid and potash. Of our feeding stuffs, grains and concentrated foods like cotton-seed meal and oil-meal contain the greatest amount of these three fertilizing constituents, and straw contains the least. Starch and woody matter are not fertilizing elements in themselves.

The next point to be borne in mind is that each animal we feed appropriates to itself of the elements of fertility in accordance with its nature and wants, so that if we supply the same amount of feed to different animals we will not get exactly the same amount of fertility in the excrement of each. A little reflection will point out the reason for these differences: A grown horse, which does not increase in weight, but each day wears out as much of his body in labor as was built up by the food, must evidently give out in the excrement all the fertilizers in the food supplied him. The colt, or a horse gaining in weight, evidently retains some of these elements in the body, as they go to help make up the increased weight. A cow giving milk transfers some of the nitrogen to the milk in the shape of caseine, and some of the potash and phosphoric acid in the shape of ash; these are for the building up of the muscle and bone of her calf. Evidently, then, the excrement of the cow giving milk does not contain all of the fertilizing elements supplied in the food, since a portion of them is carried off in the milk. Sheep require nitrogen, potash, etc., for the wool and the yolk that accompanies it, so that the manure of sheep, also, does not quite contain all of the fertilizing material in the food.

Fattening steers gain in weight, but the increase is almost wholly tallow, and there is not nitrogen, phosphoric acid or potash in that, so the steer gives practically all of the fertilizing elements in his excrement. The growing pig, like the young of other animals, takes out of the food fertilizing elements for his frame and muscle, but when grown takes out very little, for the same reason that the fattening steer takes little. In all cases, however, the amount of fertilizing elements extracted from the food by our farm animals is less than most would suppose. The bulk of the food consumed is made up of carbo-hydrates, which are burnt up in the body or converted into fat, and carbo-hydrates are valueless as manure. We may allow that growing animals take out something like ten per cent. of the fertility from the feed, while milch cows take out from twenty to twenty-five per cent. We have, then, a second proposition to be borne in mind, viz.: That the amount of fertility taken out of the food varies from nothing with animals that gain nothing in weight, such as work horses and grown cattle, up to milch cows, which place from twenty to twenty-five per cent. of the fertilizing elements in the milk.

With such small losses as these we see at once that rich manure depends mainly upon rich feed, and we begin to understand why it is that English farmers buy so much of our oil-cake to feed instead of corn, when we learn that a ton of oil-cake contains about ninety pounds of nitrogen, twenty-nine pounds of potash and nearly forty pounds of phosphoric acid, while a ton of corn contains only thirty-three pounds of nitrogen, seven of potash and twelve of phospheric acid. Eastern farmers buy nitrogen at about sixteen cents a pound, potash at three and one-half or four cents and phosphoric acid at seven cents, and pay out millions of dollars annually for commercial fertilizers containing these elements.

The third important point to be remembered is that a large part of the fertility is in the urine. In a general way it is fair to estimate that three-fourths of the fertilizing elements under consideration are in the liquids and only one-fourth in the solid excrement. This being true no space need be occupied in showing the importance of saving the liquid part of the manure.

ONE of the mistakes in setting hardy shrubs and roses is that the plants are often set too deep. As a rule the best plan is to set about as deep as they grow in the nursery, taking care always to see that the soil is well filled in around the roots.

THE teeth of animals need more attention than they often get. It seems to be the common belief that disease never attacks the teeth of animals.

HOME HINTS AND HELPS.

—Lamp wicks give a better light when cut squarely across. They should not be picked off as some advocate.

—Matches should never be placed near any article of food or seasoning in a closed space, as it will become tainted with the fumes.

—Oyster Sandwich.—Split the crackers and butter, them; lay oysters between; salt and pepper; butter. Bake five minutes.—Toledo Blade.

—Sago, rice, tapioca and every thing of that kind can be kept to advantage in glass jars; thus the contents can be easily ascertained, no dust can get into it, and the jars take up but little space.

—In making sheets, single width cloth is more economical to use than double. When partly worn the former can be ripped apart, and the outer edges seamed together, thus obtaining very decidedly more wear from them than you otherwise would.

—Geraniums are not to be recommended if you have very warm windows. In cool situations, with sunlight, they are satisfactory; but a tall, spindling geranium plant, with leaves only at the end of the stalks, is any thing but ornamental.—American Agriculturist.

—Broiled Oysters.—Take large, fat oysters; lay them on a board, dry, and season with salt and a little cayenne pepper; have the gridiron very hot; lay the oysters first in melted butter and then on the gridiron; let brown on one side and turn; take up in a heated dish on which is melted butter.

—Boiling water should not be poured over tea trays, japanned goods, etc., as it will make the varnish crack and peel off: have a sponge wet with warm water and a little soap, if the tray be very dirty, and rub it with a cloth; if it looks smeary, dust on a little flour, then rub it with a cloth. If the tray gets marked take a piece of woolen cloth with a little sweet oil and rub on the marks.—Household.

—The candy-eating habit is quite prevalent among children, and to a considerable extent among older persons. It is not a harmless indulgence, as many seem to think. It is a cause of much ill-health among children, and the predisposing cause of many acute attacks of disease of various kinds. Much dyspepsia, indigestion and many bilious attacks are directly or indirectly due to candy-eating.

—Riced Potatoes.—Boil a dozen potatoes till they are just done; drain off the water; mash them in the pot till every lump is gone. Then add half a cup of boiled milk, a large, heaped tablespoonful of butter and a tablespoonful of salt. Beat the potatoes now with a wooden spoon till they are light and creamy, and pass them as lightly as possible through a colander into the dish in which they are to be served. Set them on the side of a hot oven for five minutes to be touched with brown and serve. They may be browned with a salamander or a red-hot shovel.

FASHIONS OF THE HOUR.

Novelties in Elegant Dress Accessories and Bric-a-Brac.

Bisque figures, beloved by Mme. Pompadour, are popular for boudoirs.

Princesse skating dresses made entirely of fur are stylish, elegant and very expensive.

For the work-box of carved silver a gold thimble may be added, the cost of which would almost pay a month's rent in a brown-stone front.

Epaulets appear to be quite as much a feature of fashion as ever, many of the new styles standing like wings or an aureole on each shoulder.

Prince of Wales plume fans in pale pink, green, custard and cream, frosted, silvered and crystal sprinkled, are again displayed in the ball-room and opera box.

Letter racks for ladies' desks are shown in antique oak strapped with blackened brass, in silver-bound bird's-eye maple and in bright gilt in the flowing Florentine design.

The rich corded silks with satin luster, the superb pompadour satin brocades and the Victoria silks, with wide stripes of velvet or embossed satin, are used for the straight skirts, undraped and unadorned, that are in special favor this winter.

Simple articles of wear that are genuine are always a far better choice than imitation of the richest. A meretricious style never commands admiration, and inferior goods quickly betray their quality. Best material and long wear is the rule for those whose means are limited.

The maquech bug, with his harness of fine gold and diamond-headed pin, is again in the market waiting to be transferred to the corsage of some princess of fashion. The insect is short-lived, but his trappings are beautiful, and after yielding up his life they are attached to a bouquet brooch.

Skirts on both day and evening dresses are very simple in appearance, but never required more careful shaping and adjustment. All elaboration is centered on the bodice, but to achieve artistic and really elegant results both skirt and bodice must be cut and arranged with great care and taste.

Tufts of white or tinted feathers worn in the hair are quite the rage in coiffures arranged for full-dress occasions. Next to the wearing of jeweled pins and other gem-set ornaments, this is the most popular style, and this airy plumage now waves in barbaric splendor above my lady's head, who, because it is a mode, adopts it, regardless of the type of her countenance.—St. Louis Republic.